

Ten Most Frequently Asked Questions About Prime Time Instructional Assistants

- 1. Why is it that the pay scales, benefits packages, and work schedule for Prime Time instructional assistants vary so much from place to place?**

Prime Time statute and State Board rules address state funding and requirements for program participation. The formula does define how funding will be calculated. Funding is based on a corporation's current staff needs in relation to their need in the base year. There is no requirement that a school corporation must pay a Prime Time instructional assistant a set amount. Pay scales, benefit packages, and work schedules vary from corporation to corporation, as they do with all school staff, because there are no state requirements for uniform pay scales and benefit packages and only a minimum requirement for work schedules.

- 2. May instructional assistants work only during the hours that students are present?**

The duties that Prime Time instructional assistants may be assigned include instructional, clerical, and auxiliary duties. Full-time assistants must be employed for a minimum of 5 hours a day. Prime Time assistants shall be assigned to a classroom during the core curricular program [511 IAC 1-8-7.5 (d) (4)]. The assignment of other duties should be governed by the corporation's policies or rules.

- 3. What are the restrictions/regulations pertaining to clerical and other duties to be performed by Prime Time instructional assistants? Can an assistant be pulled to decorate bulletin boards and/or answer telephones in the school office? Can an assistant be used to do recess/lunch/bus duty for teachers other than those to which they are assigned?**

For the purpose of assisting the classroom teacher(s), Prime Time instructional assistants may perform instructional, clerical, and auxiliary duties. Prime Time assistants shall not be assigned exclusively to non-instructional/clerical responsibilities. Prime Time assistants shall be assigned to a classroom during the core curricular program [511 IAC 1-8-7.5 (d) (4)]. Assistants should only be assigned to recess/lunch/bus duties at times when their classroom students are involved in such activities.

- 4. What are the regulations regarding the use of a Prime Time instructional assistant as a substitute teacher? Is a certified teacher or a person qualified as a substitute teacher, currently employed as an instructional assistant, permitted to substitute for his/her teaching partner in case of absence, or for other teachers?**

According to 511 IAC 1-8-7.5(c) (2), a Prime Time assistant shall not be assigned as a substitute for an absent teacher. Even though the instructional assistant may be fully qualified and well suited to handle the class in the teacher's absence, the rules are very specific on this point.

- 5. Are school corporations allowed to terminate employment of Prime Time instructional assistants at the end of the year and rehire them in the fall, reassigning them to new positions?**

There is no state statute restricting a school corporation from terminating the employment of Prime Time instructional assistants and later rehiring and reassigning them. Since funding for assistants is determined by total corporation enrollment in K-3, it is often difficult for school corporations to determine their staffing needs before the beginning of the school year.

- 6. Are all para-professional staff members interchangeable? Can one be considered a Prime Time instructional assistant one year and a Title 1 assistant the rest? Can one assistant provide both Prime Time and Title I services simultaneously?**

The Prime Time statute states that school corporations shall not receive Prime Time funding for any teacher or instructional assistant and, at the same time, receive any federal or other state funds specifically for the teacher or assistant [511 IAC 1-8-8]. It is possible, however, for an instructional assistant to be paid one year with Prime Time funds and the next year with Title 1 funds, if his/her job description and funding sources have changed. An instructional assistant is subject to the requirements of the specific funding sources to employ the assistant.

7. How many teachers may one Prime Time instructional assistant be assigned?

A Prime Time instructional assistant may be assigned to work with no more than two teachers [511 IAC 1-8-7.5(d) (3)]. The size of the school corporation is not a justifying factor. If an instructional assistant is assigned to two teachers, the assignment should be consistent for the duration of the school year—s/he should not be with teachers A and B in one week and teachers C and D in another week.

8. How much in-service is required to be provided for Prime Time instructional assistants? Who is responsible to see that they receive this professional development?

According to 511 IAC 1-8-7.5(a), Prime Time instructional assistants must have a high school diploma or its equivalent and one of the following: (1) post high school work in education or a related field; (2) previous work experience in an early childhood program; (3) previous experience as an elementary classroom assistant; or (4) completion of a 15 contact hour training program conducted by the local school corporation. It is the responsibility of the school corporation to ensure that instructional assistants satisfy these requirements.

9. Is there a ceiling on the maximum number of students that can be enrolled in a Prime Time classroom? Is there a classroom enrollment figure, for example, twenty-five, that requires an assistant be hired for that classroom?

The Prime Time statute does not describe a “Prime Time classroom.” There is no cap or ceiling placed on individual classrooms or schools. Prime Time is a voluntary program offered to school corporations to maintain low teacher/pupil ratios in kindergarten through third grade. Prime Time teacher/pupil ratios differ from corporation to corporation depending on the funding formula according to 511 IAC 1-8-4 and 511 IAC 1-8-4.4. To compute class size average, a full-time teacher equals 1.0 FTE, and a full-time Prime Time instructional assistant equals .33 FTE. For example, 24 children in a class with a full-time teacher and a full-time Prime Time instructional assistant equals 18 to 1 FTE.

10. What recourse do teachers and Prime Time instructional assistants have who feel that they have not been treated in accordance with the State Board of Education rules?

If a Prime Time teacher or instructional assistant has a concern, s/he is advised to discuss the problem with the local school administration which may include the principal, superintendent and school board. Most problems can be resolved at the local level. If these channels fail to produce a satisfactory resolution, the complainant may contact the Department of Education. Only in extreme cases will the Department contact the responsible administrator in an attempt to reconcile the problem without jeopardizing funding.

NOTE: Some school corporations employ a few more instructional assistants than funded by the state. If an instructional assistant is not generating funds, that individual need not be classified as “Prime Time” and is not subject to the rules outlined for instructional assistants.